

Korrupt Yr Self Issue #6



Korrupt Yr Self #6 – Summer 2011
All Content By Erik Gamlem



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Street Walking Cheetah

I.

-I like to walk around and I'm paid to stand around
"Public Witness Program" by Fugazi

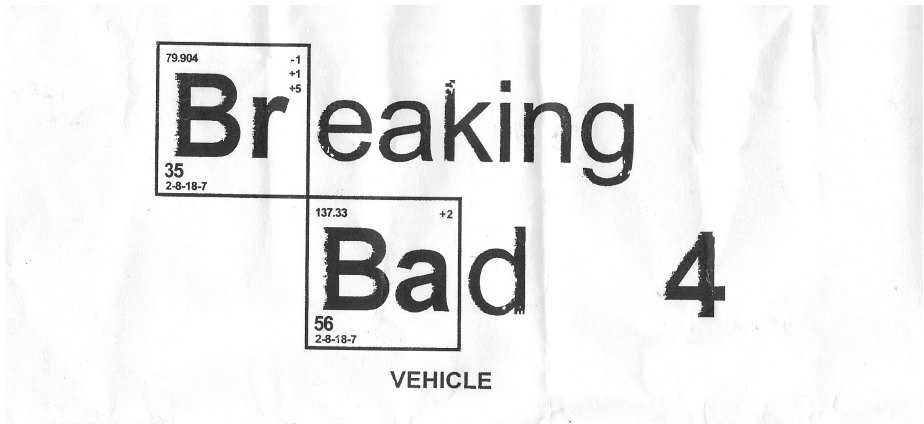
I was sitting in my comfy shorts and a t-shirt, playing video games in my living room when I got a phone call. It was an Albuquerque number, but I didn't answer it because I don't answer my phone to numbers I don't know. I should stop that shit here in the Land of Enchantment though because I don't know anyone and I'm unemployed and looking for work. This call was from Doc, who does casting of extras in Albuquerque, specifically for the AMC, Emmy award winning show *Breaking Bad*. I called Doc back immediately and we hooked up.

The next day I was scheduled to be a pedestrian with car. I didn't know what this meant other than I had to get up really early and go some place in this new city that I wasn't sure of. But I was really psyched. I didn't know that much about *Breaking Bad*. I've never had a chance to see it yet. All I knew was that it had Hal from *Malcolm in the Middle* in it and was about meth. Meth is a big issue in New Mexico. So, I guess the show is pretty awesome. But mostly I was excited to actually get some work, do something new and get paid for a new experience.

I was up at 4:20, thanks to my cats beating my alarm by ten minutes. I figured I would check some stuff out on the internet, eat some cereal and head for the door. I had packed my wardrobe the day before. I was to have two alternates to change into as well as what I was wearing. This proved futile however, because when I got to the parking lot I was told to go to, I left my stuff in the car. In the dark, which is crisp and purple and black in Albuquerque in March at 5:30 A.M. I was shuffled without questions asked or answered into a grey van and off to craft services. There, I waited.

And waited, and strolled around, and waited, and pocketed a bagel just in case, and waited and then was ushered into the food services trailer. Finally some people started handing out forms to fill out so I would get paid. Then, before we could all hand it in, we were ushered back outside and into the grey vans. I never made wardrobe for approval, never made it back to my car. I had managed to grab my Mastodon sweatshirt to keep warm. However, that would prove to be futile for reasons not entirely explained to and understood by me.

I didn't know what the hell was going on. We got to Background holding, which was in a warehouse that held big, old archways that the proprietor was selling. A big group of people were all just sitting in the chairs they had set up for us. Nobody was telling us what to do, so we just sorta sat around, drank coffee and shot the shit.



Someone called for pedestrian drivers. I thought that was me, so I followed this lady outside and on to the street with like four other people. I kept following behind her until she told me to stand on the sidewalk. Later on, someone came buy and told me to stand across the street and take my sweatshirt off.

I moved to Albuquerque because it's in the desert and it's warmer on the whole then Suburban Washington DC. And I will say this, on this day that I was a background extra, it was warmer then it normally is in Virginia. But it was windy, cold and the sun was covered up by clouds. So, that sweet sweatshirt with the awesome shaman shooting light beams out of their mouth would have been awesome to keep on. Plus, seriously, people in Albuquerque are into metal. They need to keep it authentic.

Despite the cold though, I was really excited. For one thing, I learned the answer to a question about movies I have always had. You know like when your on a public street and there are cars parked on the side of the road. I always wondered if those were random cars that were just on the street. But nope, they cast for cars. Not specific cars, just cars, that they can leave and move as they need. Also, they get more mileage out of a location by changing the cars that move on a single street. With a change of the camera angle, you can get a lot of coverage from just a few blocks.

So there I was, on some street in Albuquerque in the warehouse district, freezing with no idea what to do. Luckily, the direction was easy. Just walk straight ahead until you hear the word “cut”. It was totally easy.

II.

- *Drive it Like You Stole It.*

“Behind Curtain #” by Discount.

The thing about being a background extra is that you don’t do anything. And because you don’t do anything, you don’t actually know what to do. There were a great number of Assistant Directors, but mostly, they just shouted one word instructions.

So the second scene I was “in” featured a stunt. Not by me. I was still just standing on the street and walking. This time I was paired up with this lady, Denise, but still heading the same direction as before. The car that the main dude, Walter White, Bryan Cranston, Hal from *Malcolm In The Middle*, all bald and shit and not really on set too much because it was a stunt, was weaving in and out of traffic and popping up on the curb.

Me and Denise were walking right towards the car as it was driving up the street. It’s very weird being told what to expect and also have to act natural with out actually doing anything other than walking. Watching the other background extras, I noticed how strained, forced and repetitive the walking was. I don’t know if I was supposed to do that. No one really told me I had to have continuity.

Sometimes we were supposed to react to the car popping the curb, other times not so much. Or maybe we’re supposed to do it all the time. It’s never really clear and there are so many A.D.’s on the street, hiding in nooks, mulling about. Or something. I don’t know. I don’t want to give the impression that they aren’t doing their jobs or that they have it easy at all. They’re in charge of directing regular old everyday people who don’t totally understand how films are made. I’ve used a camera for photographs, I understand frames and blocking and lighting and all that shit. But when shit is moving and yr doing that over and over again trying to get something really bad ass and you have a bunch of mopes hanging out, I can see how that could be stressful.

No one yelled at me the whole day, so for me, that was cool. That’s how I knew that whatever I was doing, trying to act natural and surprised by the on-coming car I knew was coming, was being done to the satisfaction of whomever might have yelled at me if I acted over surprised or not surprised enough.

One time, even though I knew it was coming, watched it unfold for the dozenth time, the car hit the curb and scared the crap out of me. The driver seemed to have lost control a little bit and I thought he was totally gonna run into me a Denise and I was going to die on set. I wonder if I would have gotten paid extra?

III.

I am fascinated with life choices. My own included, for obvious reasons I think. I just wonder how people get to the moments of their life. It doesn't have to be the big moments either. Big moments are usually come by through the pressure of major, obviously difficult decisions. Those aren't so interesting. It's how those big one's lead to the small ones. Why do people ultimately do what they do and not do what they don't in this seamless narrative?



It's evident to me, on the set of *Breaking Bad* amongst the extras that most of us have had decisions made for us that brought us all here. I didn't meet anyone that had full time work, or regular work. I met one guy who was a carpenter for Smith's Grocery Store and worked during the off seasons doing repair. In between he traveled up and down the west coast picking up odd jobs and fell into extra work on *Breaking Bad* because he worked as a carpenter on set. I met a woman who was in an abusive relationship not too long ago and did what she could to make ends meet. She clearly wants to be noticed, I assume this from her make up and manner of dress, accentuating, purposely, her womanly wiles. Listening to her talk, she was fairly self empowered after years of feeling helpless, weak and worthless. She probably faces a sort of

judgment in her daily life from the stares of men. But it's clear she's confident in what she's doing.

I'm in a new land, looking for adventure and new experiences. This was just something to do, a story to have in the stitches of my life, pulled and tightened to make some type of narrative, or picture, or impression. Life is a funny thing, and when it's random and free of restrictions and worry, it's absolutely amazing. I cherish more in my life now that I get to enjoy it than when I slaved behind a desk. I wish I had made the choice not to do that day in and day out. The stories I might have in place of resentment, anger, frustration, stress and depression. Or maybe not. It's all chose your own adventure.

My life, my even stranger life now, has taken me far away from home, family, loved ones, good memories, bad memories, complicated relationships and many other things. Being on set this day was part of me stepping out, stepping above.

I'm doing what I love, not standing around and walking down the street. Actually, as I write this some five hours after we wrapped on set, after 12 hours of being on my feet, my body fucking hurts. A lot. It's the most mobile I've been since I was laid off. But I loved the experience. I have no idea what is to be of my role in this show. I have a feeling I wouldn't even notice me come summer time when this episode appears. But all day I thought about my friends, the people I've worked with who put up with the worst of me and how I was making money, working, doing something so cool and great and how I had been given this opportunity to do exciting things. I take it as a responsibility, not only to go out and do this, but to succeed at it.

By the time the day came to an end, I was ready to go home. Badly. My cats needed to get fed, my arms were cold and dry, my throat inhaled enough desert sand for one day.



Following the Footprints

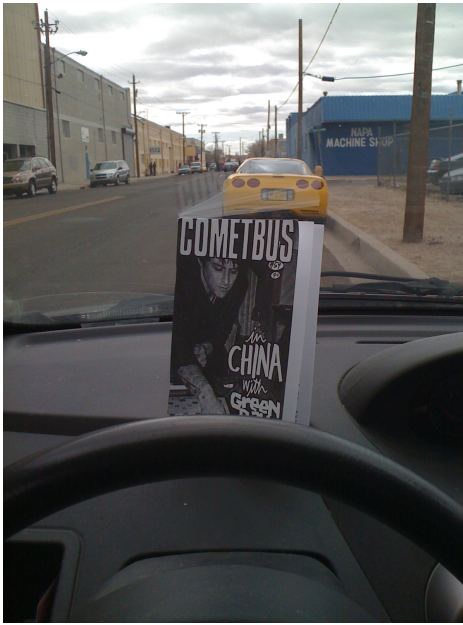
I woke up this morning and listened to The Weakerthans *Reconstruction Site* as I looked for a job. As of this writing (and that's the thing that zine writers say because this zine could be published a good three million years from this moment that I am writing it. A sad fact of life in self publishing when you rely on the ability to both be inspired and have access to a photocopier to make the 100 copies of your zine of which fifty pile up in stacks around your house.) I am unemployed. I hate looking for a job. I don't want a job. I want to go on tour with my new band, the first band I have started in over ten years. My life is on youth reset, only I have to pay my own rent. A reality that will probably have caught up to me by the time I publish this issue. Or not. I'm no fortune teller; I lack any and all possible mystic powers.

I didn't find a job I wanted. I put on Cheap Girls, who are, again as of this writing, the greatest band that no one is paying attention to. Their album *Find Me a Drink Home* is a bit of genius that is totally lacking in so much music. The songs are direct, well written, a little somber and the lyrics are great. The vocals on this album are so sullen that I want to cry every time I hear them. They remind me of another great band, one that you can dispute all you want; one in which I will dispute said statement in this here zine. But we'll get to that in a minute.

Aaron Cometbus is haunting this zine. It's really not that cool to be a struggling zinester, six issues in and have this obsession with Cometbus. The thing is, he is directly responsible for me wanting to keep doing this. I wasn't even sure I was going to do more than one issue, and then Cometbus fell in my life. Now it seems, I get a new Cometbus around the same time I get the bug to write shit down. It's also in very poor taste to admit all this and then tread directly in the footsteps that Cometbus threw down in a recent issue. I don't, quite frankly, give a fuck. All 50 copies of this zine will fall into who knows what type of hands. If the only reason that happens is because Cometbus makes me want to write, well then I have nothing to apologize for.

When I was in high school, I used to be into skateboarding. I had a skateboard, I hung out with skateboard kids, I could drop in on ramps, ollie pretty high and do sick manuals. I liked ridding mini-ramps and slashing large banks. In about 1992 skateboarding sort of changed from the DIY style I was used to into this very technical, acrobatic and beautiful sport that it largely is today. I couldn't hang, but that didn't curb my love and interest in skateboarding. So I watched a lot of skateboarding videos.

One of those videos was the beloved *Questionable* video by the Plan B skate team. See, the thing about skateboarding is that's how I learned



about music back before the internet. I lived in the suburbs. Zine culture, even Maximum Rock and Roll didn't even occur to us. But skateboard videos did. Amongst the montage part in the middle of the video was a song by a band called Green Day. The song was "Disappearing Boy" for those of you who need to know such things. We were all pretty hooked at that point. The song wasn't listed in the credits, but someone managed to figure out who they were shortly

after. Copies of *39/Smooth* made the rounds as one of my more clever friends ordered the cassette from Lookout.

After a few weeks, I kind of forgot about this band. Then *Dookie* came out and all hell broke loose. By then I was driving in cars, getting knee deep in DC punk rock and reading the occasional *MRR* though I found it mostly didactic and covering a slew of bands no one really cared about that weren't very good. *Dookie* landed in my hands from some of the same skate rat kids. The album took our little group by storm. It was full of all the misanthropic bullshit that suburban, American kids are subject to. Comparative to the rest of the world, though we didn't know it at the time, it wasn't all that bad. But like I said, all hell broke loose.

It's not entirely Green Day's fault that the greater world found punk rock and DIY culture. It's also not their fault that the luxuries that the indie rock record labels use to afford are no longer. For every Merge Records with Grammy Award winning artists there are the same number of Teen Beat records who still exist, but struggle to have relevance. For every No Idea records, who exist as the prime example of what a punk rock label should be, there are the Lookout Records, Green Day's indie label, of the world who squandered their good name with piss poor management decisions and screwing over a ton of great bands.

As quickly as my hard on for Green Day came, the inability to get it up for them set in just as fast. Within weeks, every other kid in my school was dying their hair green and listening to *Dookie*. Suddenly, kids I

fucking hated were asking me about punk rock and trying to get me to listen to Bad Religion and Operation Ivy. Back then, I thought I was cool and that really pissed me off, that my little world that I had carved out was invaded. Seeing them at Lollapalooza that summer was the icing on the cake. I don't think they played anything off of *Kerplunk* or *Smooth* except for "Knowledge" which was by Operation Ivy anyway. No "At the Library", no "Disappearing Boy", no "One of My Lies" or even "2,000 Light Years Away". Oh sure, there was "Welcome To Paradise" but that hardly counts and should have been the writing on the wall.

I turned my back on Green Day. I was one of those kids. The irony of hating on a band at Lollapalooza went completely over my head, and now, as an adult, I realize I was being childish and stupid. But we love the things that we love so much when we are young that we have absolutely no leeway when we think something or someone personally betrays that love. Even the people making it.

But I didn't know shit about Green Day, and by that, I mean the people. And still, I can't fathom what the hell their lives must have been like or how they felt about the terrible backlash from 17 year old suburbanites like myself. All I know is punk rock changed forever. Even in a post-Nirvana world I had found a musical language that I felt I belonged to. All that changed post *Dookie*.

Green Day and I didn't really talk for a long, long time. That was pretty true of most people. For a good ten years or so I wasn't so in touch with what they were doing. The song "J.A.R" was pretty awesome, still one of my favorites actually. But *Insomniac* and *Nimrod* left me cold. At the time *Insomniac* felt like the band was trying too hard. The frustration was honest, but the application came off as entirely false. Today, I understand that album a great deal more. It's an unsung gem to behold. *Nimrod* I still don't own. I don't even think I've heard much off the album except for the insufferably overplayed "Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)" acoustic number that seems to act as the link between Green Day punk and Green Day Rock and Roll.

Warning truly piqued my interests. It sounded like the boys listened to a lot of *Wood/Water* by Promise Ring and applied their very pop sensible stylings to it. It was a great album without having to be a Green Day album. Everything sounded relaxed and chilled out. The album felt more like demo's recorded by dudes in their garage who bought a lot of recording equipment. It was the story of a bunch of guys who just wanted to write some songs.

That wasn't really enough to draw me back in. By then I was working for the man, living someone else's dreams. Green Day hadn't sold out, not really. Not by any measurable, true standards. After all, they were

playing music, touring the world, making records. In essence, doing what they loved. I sold out, working at a fucking bank and on my way to buying a house in suburbia. Oh sure, I still played music, even a couple shows. But let's face it, I didn't chase my dreams. I made different life choices, possibly ones in which I never had to come close to facing all the questions that the three dudes in Green Day ever did.

So we're at the part of the story where we talk about redemption. In this case it was in the form of *American Idiot*. More than *Dookie* ever could have, *American Idiot* turned Green Day into megastars. Once again this band, with kids of their own and well into their 30's were the talk of 17 year old dorks with stupid hair and eye make up. Suddenly Green Day was bigger the second time around and Hot Topic was psyched to cash in. I still have mixed feelings about the band and the album and the aftermath, truth be told. I think it's a complicated album with elements of a deep understanding of America and Americans place in the world and an oversimplification of what is, essentially a very complex set of issues. But, at the core of it, it's a Rock and Roll record. Part *Hair*, part *Tommy*, Green Day created their masterpiece, the album that will be what they are remembered for. Which, for a bunch of 30somethings who were thought to be at the end of their career by anyone sensible is still pretty impressive.

So here we are now. There's been a DVD, another album some more tours, lots of hype and eyeliner. I got let go of my corporate job, landed in Albuquerque, New Mexico and that about brings us to the present tense. Except for Issue #54 of Cometbus, which this is really about, so much as it's about Green Day. I don't want to spoil the zine for you. Frankly, if you aren't reading it, you are a loser much like I was until I found it.

We make life choices, and in those life choices we make concessions and compromises with our beliefs. We totally tell ourselves certain things to make believe that what we are doing is for our best interest. But I find, that rarely, if ever, do people actually have their best interest in mind. Part of being an American is having an almost alarming amount of choices that you are free to make. There is a beauty and a responsibility in this and often, we fuck this up all the time. I think about life choices a lot. I wonder how strangers get to certain points in their lives. Not just people who seem down on their luck, but anyone, at line in the bank or the bank teller or just some rando person at the diner where I drink my coffee. We all get to the places we get by making choices all the time. It's hard to know where those choices will take you so we just make them up as we go along.

That, in essence is what Green Day's story is all about. They started as a bunch of kids who just really, really, really wanted to play music. And

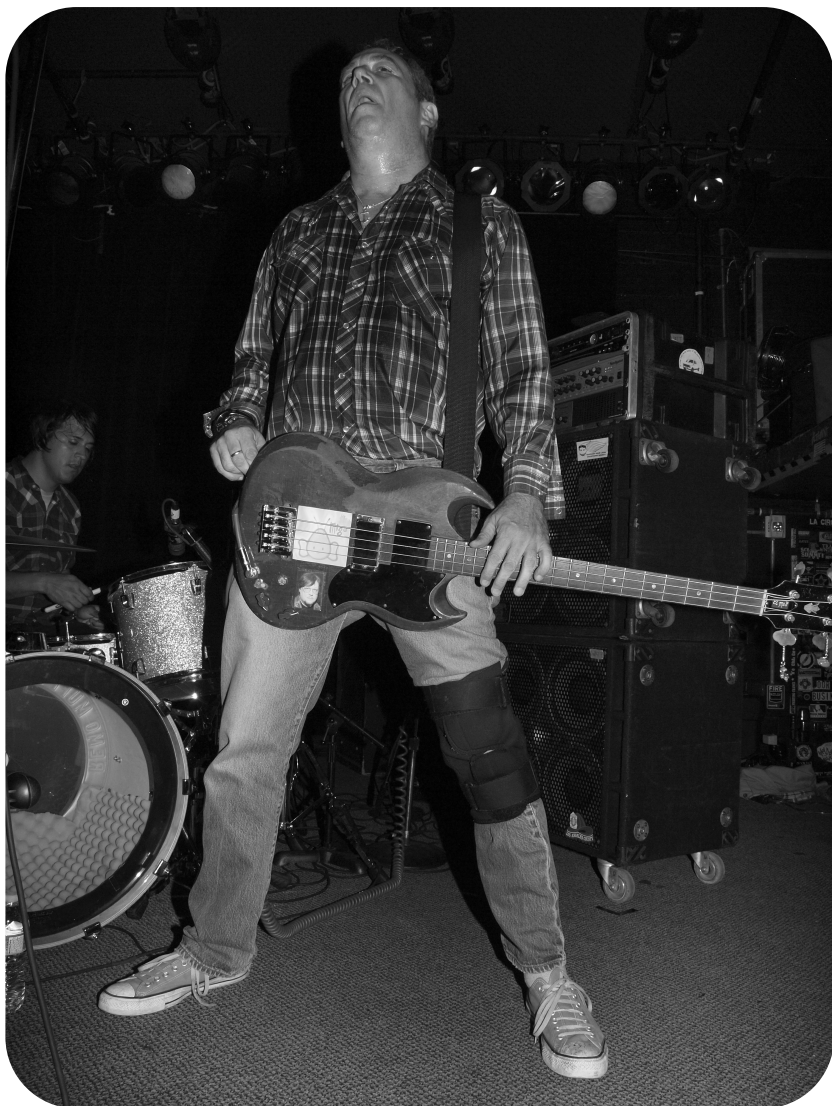
so they did. From backyards to stadiums in Tokyo to the Grammy's (which I don't think they've won but it's quite possible). I made choices that, at the moment, have led me to drinking rum at 3:57PM on a Tuesday afternoon.



Oddly enough, my choice to purchase Cometbus #54, led me to purchase *Awesome as Fuck*, the new DVD/CD combo that coincidentally was released the day I finished reading Comet's latest, personal novella. Watching the DVD when I got home, I saw a band that are, perhaps the greatest performers in Rock and Roll right now. They are, no doubt on another level. Even if I get to play music a lot more than I do now, or finish that damn book or make any kind of modest living doing anything creative, it will never be where they are. I'm not that good. I don't mean I don't have those same talents or creativity. But I don't have that vision to rock thousands each night. It's not in me. I wouldn't mind a life of mid-sized clubs and VFW halls. What they do is special, no matter how you want to look at it. Sure they are closer to the Rolling Stones than they are to No Age, but that doesn't make what they do something less special, less important or less phenomenal.

It's a bit strange to come full circle. The 16 year old me would probably be pretty pissed. Well, not really, because I still am that 16 year old. More now than I have been probably since I was 16. But the 33 year old me sees things a lot clearer. Green Day, they were true to themselves, making the choices and compromises that ultimately they were comfortable with. They didn't turn their back on punk rock or me or anything else, they did what they could to keep doing what they wanted to. Maybe this is bigger than what they thought, I suspect that to be true, but ultimately, they wake up, they grab guitars and drum sticks and they play music. There is no shame in that.

Mike Watt – Albuquerque, NM



Life as Pornography

-So I won't worry about my timing, I want to get it right.
from "Sober" by Kelly Clarkson

At what point in our lives do we fail our heroes, our gods, our saviors? I know, that I have failed mine, mightily and with no shame. I place my head at the opening of the guillotine and wait, with laughter in my throat, for my executioner to pull the chord so that I might get that sweet relief death is said to provide.

It's coming, that great judgment day where I will have to atone for my trespasses; all the shit talking I've done, all the judging I've made on my fellow man, all the terrible things that I have said. One day, I'll be put on trial and asked to defend myself, and I am ready for that day, that is to be sure.

I've been unemployed for the last five and half months. I was laid off from a corporate job, by a vice president who was so unable to manage his team that the director of my department was on a steady diet of anger, misery, alcohol and Ambien. I think I was pretty good at my job, but I hated it. I also have a temper and swore, a lot. Even when surrounded by hell, people don't like profanity and the obvious observations of negativity. But if I am made to suffer people are going to hear about it. It's not my best quality to be told, but it's not one I apologize for. Organizations are not designed to be accepted. Most organizations of people aren't designed at all. The construct of how we work together and management and all that shit is mostly an afterthought of the people hired at lower wages than the CEO's to deal with.

I don't have a steady income at the moment. Actually, I've only made about \$350 dollars on my own talents in that time. It's partly from a lack of trying and partly because I am living in a smaller city where I don't know too many people. I am getting out there though and that's cool. I worry about not making money sometimes, but mostly I am happy to get up in the morning and read, make art, talk to friends and try to organize my life. Some days are better than others. Hell, some weeks are better than others.

Some of the art I am making is an attempt at being more commercial. I am not a very skilled artists. I recognize this and understand the limits of my artistic ability. I don't really see this as a hindrance though. I am developing my craft and can see the progress as I take it more seriously and apply some thought and care into the final product. It's a lot more

satisfying then just making art for arts sake; for my own, self indulgent gratification.

My main problem is accountability. Part of why I was good at my job was I believed in being accountable for my work. I didn't feel accountable to my bosses; generally I thought they were short sighted and lacked the intelligence to understand the complexities of our problems. They also failed to show basic human compassion and believed in the order of hierarchy and disregarded any and all input from their staff. But, in the semi structure there was, it was easy to produce work and the results asked. I am not the best writer in the world, but grammar, spelling and punctuation aside, I did know how to illustrate a story with words. This is what I studied in college and ultimately was what I was paid to do.

But I seem to lack an accountability to myself. I don't know if this is an issue of self worth or self confidence or what. The notion that that is the truth seems more absurd the farther away I get from that damn desk back in Arlington, Virginia. For one, I am a lot happier now than I have been in any other point in my adult life. Getting up now is awesome and though I don't always follow through on my day in and day out plans, life has a new kind of meaning.

Sometimes I just think I am really lazy if I don't have an outside force pushing on me. I'm not too worried I am going to fall through the cracks of society. I don't know why, it's not that I think it can't happen to me, I just don't think it will. It's not a matter of belief, I just feel like there are enough people in my life that, no matter how bad it might get will bail me out with a couch and a cup of coffee and a lot of not putting up with my shit so I get off my ass and go work at Target or something.

I have a plan to rectify this. It's not a totally formulated plan, but I think I am going to listen to the universe. I'm going to try to execute my plan. I've found that I can actually do that if I put effort into it. I am less lazy now not working then when I was employed. I just have more free time to be lazy. That's not totally good and I am trying to fill up my time more with activities, action, adventures. Somewhere, I'll get it right. Somehow I'll make it work. I got here. I can go anywhere.

Flint Anderson

-Well that's okay I got me some pals and they will never say "we don't have a chance!"
from "Chance" by Pygmy Lush

I have, so far as I can find, no photographic evidence of knowing Flint Anderson. I have, in fact, no tangible evidence of knowing Flint Anderson. Despite the broken bass guitar in my possession that once sat in his house, played by him for years that still probably has his skin ground into the metal, it points to nothing.

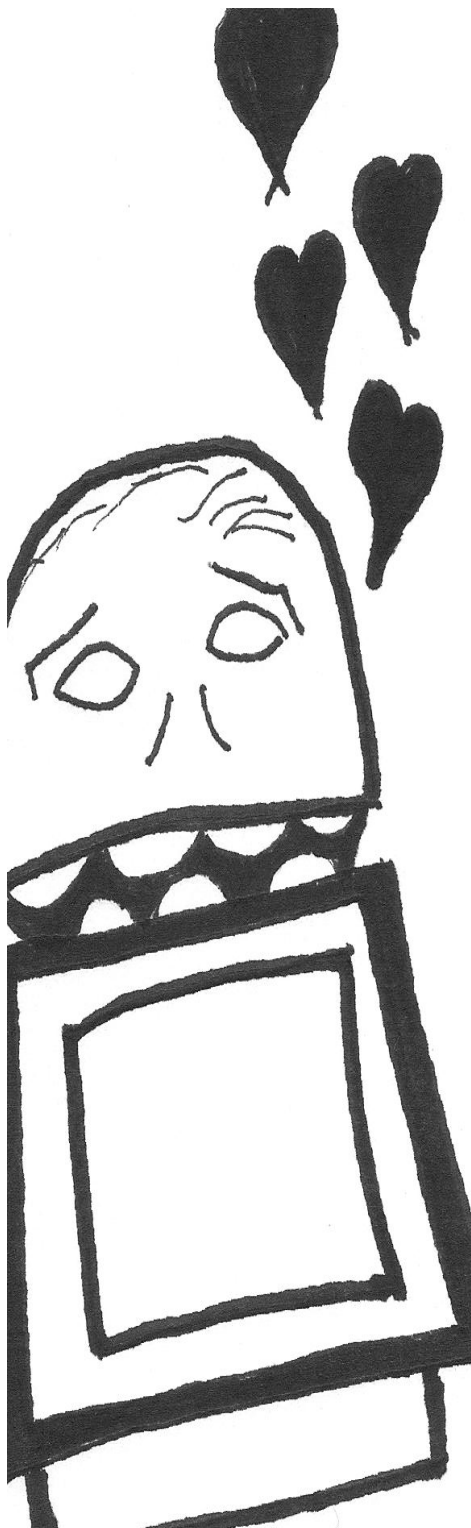
Growing up when I did in the 90's which is a decade that ended over a decade already, we didn't document any moments of our lives, the way every mundane, random and terrible moments of our lives are now. Each 140 character of thought was not hovered over in a room full of friends to share with a universe of strangers. We didn't have digital cameras, and those of us that were into photography were more selective, expressive and making attempts at being creative. We weren't always smart enough to just capture the random, fleeting moments of our friends at their most intimate. And surely there is no vast, online catalog of every party, birthday, wreckage or other milestone event from our lives. I knew Flint Anderson, but I have no documentation of that friendship.

I met Flint through a mutual friend, Kurt. Kurt and I became pals in middle school because we were both into metal and goofy looking in our own respects. He was tall and lanky, with blonde hair and big teeth. I was short and skinny, put together in a hodgepodge of ill fitting clothes and a penchant for black t-shirts. The summer after eighth grade (I think, in all honesty it might have even been the summer after Freshman year of high school now that I think about it) I got a call from Kurt that we were starting a band and he found a drummer who lived in his neighborhood. I didn't live in the same neighborhood, but my parent's house wasn't that far away. Those were the days when I would get my skateboard and push my amp the mile and half up the hill to Kurt's neighborhood, guitar strapped to my back in a gig bag. For the record we were first called Schizophrenic Psychedelic Warlords until we changed it to Abortion shortly before breaking up.

Flint was the first and only boy who ever kissed me on the lips. It's unfortunate that as a straight man, my first kiss with another male was a fairly awesome score. Flint was very good looking, long, lion mane like hair that fell on his shoulder, olive-brown skin, piercing eyes and a great smile. Further, he was really muscular and chiseled from weight lifting. He was chased by many girls and quite frankly a gorgeous

human being. If I was ever curious about boys, I would have messed around with Flint for sure.

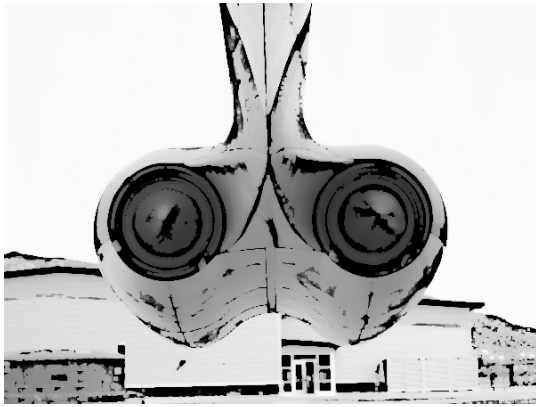
The kiss itself was also was romantic and bold, after school while our friends all milled about outside our meeting place before walking home. He walked up to me, grabbed the back of my head, squeezed my waist and laid a passionate kiss on me. In full view of everyone. I was more surprised then anything, the act being totally unexpected. When I asked, dazed, what the hell he did that for, he shrugged and said "I wanted to see what it was like to kiss a boy" and then we went about our afternoon of music making (this time in C.O.P. which stood for Children of Pornography; we played two shows both in the homes of two girls that were into Flint). I realize most gay and queer kids have much more bothersome, troubling and disastrous first kisses with partners that were nowhere near as good looking as Flint. And for that I apologize. There was no romance in the kiss, but to this day, I still think of the act fondly, even if it was slightly in the vein of our group trying to be provocative within the confines of boring,



suburban, hetero-normative culture.

Flint and I remained friends through part of college. He left the state to go to Eastern Carolina and I stayed in town, still trying to make music with Kurt and other friends from the neighborhood. I would see Flint on breaks and in the summer for a few years, but increasingly less. He went to England for a while to study and after that we kind of lost touch. It turns out, one of our strong bonds was through Kurt and me and Kurt had a falling out that was not reconcilable. That's a story for another time and a lot of beers though.

The last I heard of Flint Anderson was he had gotten a girl pregnant, dropped out of school and moved back into his parents house to start raising this kid. I think he may have gone back for a while and then got a job doing something where he climbs trees. It sounded like he was happy.



In the waning years of my youth into the adult crash I haven't tried to get in contact with him again. We weren't the best of friends, but we shared some good times. But I wonder how strong my memories are, how they will hold up over time. Flint was

more than just a casual friend, but clearly it wasn't a life long relationship. I don't know how much of that is a design of my own personality. I seem to have a lot of friends in far off places and I myself am now in one of those far off places, fractured from my youth and all the massively important and awesome things I did, moping about the greater Northern Virginia populace, too cool for anything.

I wonder how much has really changed and how much has really stayed the same. Could we all just pick up, after all these years apart and make terrible noise, terrible art, self referential poetry to our tortured, suburban and ultimately futile lives? Or are we too defeated for that? Are those bonds truly broken? I want to believe I will love Flint Anderson forever, until I take my last breath, and that he feels the same.

No Age – Santa Fe, NM



Failed Courtship #1

-C'mon baby you can tell the cops why...

from "Girl O'Clock" by The Dismemberment Plan

If I've noticed one thing since moving to Albuquerque, and that would be a feat in and of itself, it's that the grocery store by my house hires some really cute young women to bag groceries. I am not used to having an extra person at the check out line bag groceries. Back in Virginia, it was always the person checking your food items through their scary bar code scanners that also bagged them. That always struck me as weird because that unskilled labor was always work I thought grocery stores did to help employ the youth of the day and keep them from shoplifting. But I guess on the progressive East Coast (editors note: please read *progressive* with sarcasm) they're cutting costs by cutting employees.

Anyway, since I am unemployed and go to the grocery store at all kinds of odd hours I can't really tell how old these young ladies are. Also, everyone here is nice. Like really nice. Like, they smile all the time and say 'hello' and 'how are you and how's your day' and other such polite sentences with actual sincerity. My brain gets really confused when these really sweet, attractive ladies have pleasant conversations with me. Several times I want to ask them if they want to drink beer and eat some of the various food I am buying, but I never do because I feel like that's the most inappropriate thing to do ever.

But one time I didn't. Once, I was a young dude, living in an apartment with Steve Chu and this other dude whose name escapes me at the moment. I want to say it was Ryan, but it wasn't. He was a born again Christian, Republican type of average middle American doomed for a very contrite, boring life. He was cordial, but had no sense of personal hygiene, had really stupid values and after about four months, met a girl and spent most of his nights with her. He showed up only to pay his rent or deposit dirty laundry in his room.

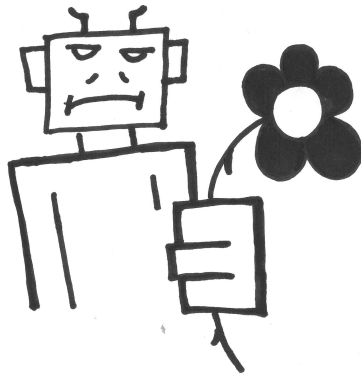
Steven Chu was pretty cool, a bit strange, but nice enough. We had nothing in common, but we went grocery shopping together a lot. Somehow, between age and cultural differences we managed to form some small moments of symbiosis and actually did ride share and food share and stuff like that. It was very progressive and punk rock of us.

One time, well actually several times, I got in line to pay for my truly awesome and healthy choices of food stuffs and there was this really, really cute young lady there. After a while I started to really like her in this weird, detached, impersonal way that sometimes I think guys do

when they keep running into attractive, young women in the service industry. For some people I think it's a power trip, for other people, it's sometimes the only pleasant interaction they have all day. Baristas at coffee shops get this raw deal, as do ladies that work in restaurants. They are expected to be nice and friendly and dudes definitely have the ability, sometimes willfully, to misinterpret that shit.

So one day, me and this girl got to talking about music while we checked out. And I got super excited because I am a nerd and if one thing gets me all hyperactive it's a conversation about music. I went home and made her a mix tape. Like right away. Then I had Steve drive me back up to the grocery store, I got some more items, I have no idea what, probably duct tape, lotion and condoms or something else equally terrifying.

her line, and gave paid for my went home.



I got back in her the tape, groceries and

I never, ever saw actively avoided that grocery store. drive to other chains, farther stopped having with cute ladies in industry. Just kept down, collected my coconut oil and shotgun shells and marched right the fuck out of the store.

her again. I going back to I made Steve grocery store away. I conversations the service my head

I probably should have followed up. That would have been more brave and less creepy. Steve used to see her all the time, apparently she lived in our apartment complex with her identical twin sister. Steve talked to her and teased me endlessly about it, which I no doubt deserved.

These days, in the post cassette tape world, this shit wouldn't happen. For one, I am too old to be asking anyone of an ambiguous age anything. At 23, that slip up was a lot easier to recover from and not that big of a deal. You just moved on. Now it would show an incredible lack of judgment on my part and has the potential to come off as really gross and inappropriate. It's all about verification now. Which sucks, because I listen to shit like Weedeater. My time spinning around the sun and that which I exhibit are clearly disconnected by most modern standards. Further, a 23 year old version of me would probably just get her email address and make a mix and send her a mediafire link which would give her an opportunity, if indirectly to respond to such things.

Either way, the point is, Albuquerque has too many cute, young women working at the grocery store and I can't handle it.

While We Sleep: On Des Ark, Pygmy Lush and Independent Music

This originally appeared online at korruptyrself.wordpress.com for less than a month.



Part One

- Awake. I'm down. Money is just bullshit. Friends, music, adventure is what it's about. My alarm is set. Get some sleep, princess.

Text Message sent to friend and travel partner Nolan Almonti in the twilight hours before driving to Phoenix, AZ

- Have guts, it's easy, just be stupid and don't think about shit. That's what I did and now I live in Albuquerque.

Comment post to Laura Jane Hamilton on having guts.

There is a sound, concrete reason as to why I drove 939.8 miles in 22 hours to watch two bands, from Virginia and Pennsylvania respectively, play music for maybe a total of an hour and forty minutes. This blog that you read whenever you feel like it or stumble upon it is, at least for now, the journal of my interaction with music. I try to be wide and vast with these experiences. I want to capture as much of my recollections, thoughts and opinions of the music I love, the music I find and the music that is reaching a greater populace. I don't showcase all of my reactions to all music. I try to, I really, really do, but it gets very difficult at times. Some reactions are more important than others, more deeply felt, more immediate. The process by which I filter this out isn't so much a process, but a violent, vile, head vomiting mess in which my arthritic fingers dance across the keyboard while I often deprive myself sleep, food and water and other basic needs. It's not heroic, or done for any reasons of grandeur or designed for any type of recognition. I can't spell, have terrible grammar and my sentence structure is suspect. I do this because I have to. All these words are complicit in my being, much like my relationship to music.

There is a personal story in relationship to my interaction with Des Ark and Pygmy Lush. It's one that you should, by now, be familiar with and not one that I intend to repeat here. But it is important to the story I want to write, what I want to convey. It's not a story of deep friendship, it's just a personal journey, an exchange between myself and the people who make the music I love. These relationships are bizarre to be sure, or possibly very common in independent music circles. I have never tried to figure out if there are other people like me that get so crazed by this music that they photo and blog the shit out of it. I wonder how many of us take the opportunity to interact with their favorite musicians that is afforded by the interpersonal nature of playing music in places that doesn't separate the audience from the band. This is part of the magic, part of the allure for me, that I can shake hands, or in some cases offer warm hugs to road weary travelers; have small but personal conversations. It's awesome that I can steal images from lives on stage as just another level of documentation that this all might in fact be real. Those moments behind the

lens, in front of the band, while these strange, manipulated sounds burn from speakers seems so surreal that these little moments of evidence and interaction are all I can do to convince myself that it's not just a dream. Yet I still remain unconvinced.



The anticipation of Des Ark and Pygmy Lush's arrival to Albuquerque, New Mexico where I have lived since December of 2010, was making me physically sick. Don't be mistaken, I love it here, but I was homesick a little bit that day. It's unfamiliar and new and often lonely here. Mostly I mean this in terms of finding and exploring music as much as I mean that in terms

of not knowing where I am or missing familiar faces, friends and family. So when the white van with Virginia plates rolled down Central Ave my arms shot up in victory. A part of home was here in my new city and for a moment, I felt like it was all just for me. There was a comfort in the road beaten faces that has been missing in my life by circumstance of uprooting and driving across country. I related to the tattered, unsettled eyes.

Aimée Argote, I'm not really sure what I can say about her or her music at this point to convince you how important it is to have in your life. Part of what I want to convey here is that sometimes, the importance of the music in DIY culture supersedes the boundaries that DIY culture sets. This is true of both the art made by Pygmy Lush and that of Des Ark. Aimée's music is difficult, both in the actual structure of the songs and the content of her lyrics. Obviously, it's no more difficult to hear than any other music, it's not a brutal onslaught of heavy sounds or terrible wailings, but it pushes at the limits of what one normally, maybe even reasonably expects out of music and lyrics. Aimée pulls the sheets back on a life that is filled with self-inflicted wounds, wrought experiences, sexual abuse and the love between friends. All of it, every note, every sound, every beat, every word is striking and beautiful. It can cut and sooth in one sequence.

It's been six years since Des Ark last released an album. Since *Loose Lips Sink Ships* came out, drummer Tim Herzog moved to DC and faded out of my view at least. Aimée started playing these solo shows in the wake of Tim's departure. This is where I really got familiar with her music. What was once a rock explosion of glass sharp chords, crushing drums and Aimée's vocal wails was

now transformed into soft whispers over soft chords that sometimes were crashed into by a raging fist. The songs were about love and misery, life and hell and had I had any emotional capacity left after being beaten raw at work all day I probably would have folded up into myself. More emotionally mature and sound people did often fall into tears at those shows. They were breathless and heavy and the tension was only cut by Aimée's rambling, nervous banter between songs that was often just personal stories of embarrassment turned into jokes. Her music is serious as hell, but through all of this pain and violence Aimée finds humor, joy and love in life. This brought an even greater power to her work that matched the rock juggernaut version of old.

Eventually she inherited a band and began to play loud versions of these new songs. First it was with two DC kids, and there was something so obviously destructive about this version of the band. They were three people who were ready to kill everyone in the room and they often did. Welch left and Ashley stayed for a while. Then Ashley moved and Aimée picked up two friends from back home in North Carolina. Then she moved to Philly, but guitarist Noah Howard had the good sense to stay along for the ride. In the mist of all this, while living in DC I went to every show she played in town. Some people will have a preference over which "version" of the Des Ark experience they prefer. This attitude always baffles me because the true genius of Des Ark is the power the two opposite ends both have. If it was a house show with Aimée playing in the living room, or a desolate squat where the trio exploded, danced and intertwined, it didn't matter to me. It was all Des Ark and it was all bound to fuck up my emotions and pull apart my very ordinary, plain life.

The frustrating part about being a fan of this music was not having anything at home that sufficiently captured this music. There was *Battle of the Beards*, a split LP with Ben Davis that had five songs of the two dozen or so that she was working on. There were also the WXDU releases, which were as close an approximation as one could get, though all the swear words were obscured as to be safe for broadcast. But there was never any sign of a new album, one that documented what was ultimately the best music being made in the ghettos of punk rock. Then, one day in February of 2010 I got an email.

Don't Rock the Boat, Sink the Fucker is more than I ever dreamed it would be. To be honest, at first, when Aimée played it for me it was too complex. Everything was too clean and I couldn't understand it at all. Even the soft songs were played on electric guitars and suddenly the sharpness of it all made me feel uneasy. But then, months later, when I secured a copy before I left DC, I had a lot more time to take my lashings and what a pleasure that was to do. Aimée said that this was the album that she wanted to make, explaining why it took so long but also why it was so painful to take in. Everything was as she wanted it

and that can be a very difficult album to have to fall in love with, but I have fallen in love with it. More than I really wanted to. More than my head and heart truly have room for, especially now as I type this at some odd hour on a Sunday morning. But the buzz and hum of "It's Only a Bargain if you Want it" kills me in the moments of the refrain before the song explodes once again.

When Des Ark plays live, it's always with intensity. Aimée and Noah are being backed up by Johnny Ward on the drums for this tour, and it's been a piece that has not been a part of the Des Ark experience for a while. This is not to take anything away from any of the drummers that followed Tim Herzog, but Johnny is the closest approximation one could get for this role. Obviously, being the only drummer in PG99, a heavy band that often had more guitar players than a Glenn



Branca orchestra, makes one have a large role to play. I had no idea, honestly, how much the music would change with Johnny behind the drum kit, but it did, tremendously. The details are fuzzy, but how can you detail fury in musical form? You can try, but you don't succeed. And if you have tried and felt you have succeeded, then you have failed twice. My recollections of the Albuquerque set are as follows: small crowd, terrible acoustics, bar with chit-chatters, thrashing drums, chords intertwining between Noah and Aimée, a soft song no one could hear, more violence, sudden death. It was over before I even knew it really started.

I'm not 100% sure I even remember Pygmy Lush. Every time I have seen them, it's been a dream. Like Des Ark, for a while anyway, they too had two identities ascribed to them. One was the post Mannequin hardcore, punk rock, grunge covered fuzz rock that still lurks in their veins and anyone who thinks it's from days past, I assure you by the looks in their eyes it is not. My relationship with this was not one that I favored, I admit, though the "loud" songs on their Turboslut split were some of the best they had written in this vein in a long time. But when Lovitt records released *Mount Hope* in 2009 I knew that these boys had taken a massive step forward. Hell, that's probably why that damn split is so good (least we forget Turboslut, who I would be remiss in not mentioning a tad more, were amazing and their small but significant

contributions to the music world hold more in their hands than the entire catalog of any band on this planet).

The boys from Sterling, Virginia have done something so unexpected and intense. People want to call it folk rock, but that doesn't really cut it. For one, it's too dark and dirty to be anything anyone in any "folk" community would claim. Just because they rely on acoustic guitars does not assume their songs into any tradition of music that is still seen mostly as a relic. This music grows, literally, in a shed in the last remnants of rural Northern Virginia by punk kids. As far as I am concerned, it's everything Punk when we accept that punk is what you make it. That's been the philosophy of Mike Taylor for as long as I have known him, and that's been a fairly long time. *Mouth Hope* crawled out of the basements and into the fields and lies somewhere between the two, capturing the nature of all things that Pygmy Lush has been through. Which, if you read the lyrics (and you should) is quite a lot. The album asked as many questions as it provided answers and the alarming one was, "what will these boys do next?". This a question that, honestly, I wasn't sure I wanted answered. How do you follow-up an album that is so completely life changing? And I don't mean that in the "man, that music changed my life, bro" kind of way. I mean that I saw these people, who I knew in the periphery of my experience, grow up the way people of such an ilk should grow up and in a way I wish I had.

Everything that the members of Pygmy Lush have done in their total music career has been through their own labor. Aside from the physical releases of the albums, which are done in close relation with good friends, so as to blur any perceived separation, the band operates totally DIY (this is true of Des Ark too, just so you know). Back in their PG99 days, the Taylor Bros and Mr. Ward had ample opportunity to take a different route. While their friends were getting covered in glossy magazines and inheriting debt from albums on big-ticket "indies", these guys kept making music on modest budgets, touring in vans they bought, putting out albums with their friends hobby labels and doing everything they did through the labor of their own hands and those of the people who loved them so much that they pitched in. It's been a good ten years or more of this life for these guys and they still do it the same way. The silk screen t-shirt I bought is evidence of this.

PG99 existed in a time when so-called independent bands were often accompanied by tour managers, publicists, stage hands and god knows what else. This major label mentality obscured the lines forever of what punk rock and DIY were all about. Yes, it's true, much of this was groups of friends building upon a support network that existed and trying to make it better. But eventually it morphed into this bizarre, pseudo rock star bullshit and suddenly that intimate setting created in small spaces between band and fan were now

being obscured by this extra layer of shit. In order to get an interview for your zine you now had to email someone at a PR firm, t-shirts were twenty dollars and there were too many designs to choose from and they were no longer sold by a band member, but some merch guy who was never the same as the tour manager. Shit got out of hand and it sucked, a lot. It was also funny watching roadies tune guitars on stages when only 50 kids showed up at the show. But that was the nature of what was increasingly becoming a business.

Now, don't get me wrong. I don't think for a second it's wrong for a touring band to make money on t-shirts, records and playing shows. It's the only way they get from town to town and the only way that they can finance records. If you were in a band luckily enough to "get signed" to an indie label that actually gave you a recording budget, it was usually pretty modest and did not afford you the opportunity to make the album that you truly wanted to make. It was tough back then, it's even worse now. Gas prices are way up. Traveling even for a weekend jaunt requires that at least 50 people show up to your show, just to make enough money for gas and to eat. Never mind maintenance, insurance or getting a place to sleep in a bed should no one offer you a floor. Record sales, WAY DOWN. This selfish internet generation of kids have this grubby handed, entitlement complex where everything is free. These downloads take away sales from touring bands who rely on the money earned from these sales to get from town to town, eat food, buy instruments, pay engineers and sometimes procure the occasional poncho or baja in the middle of the desert. That Des Ark and Pygmy Lush even opted to do a full, six-week US tour is amazing. It's been over three years since both of these bands were even in this part of the country.

So while the going was good while living in DC and a show from these bands occurred somewhere near by every three months or so, now it's rarity. This is true of all bands. I remember a time when the touring cycle of my favorite bands from out-of-town meant I got to see them at least twice a year. Then they would go home, write another album and another year later they'd hit the road again. If I got really lucky I could see them at three or four stops on the east coast, traveling to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore or Richmond if necessary to get in as much face time as possible. Now a days, if you get one of those cities or a DC date, you're pretty lucky. Touring for an independent band is more of a risk these days and thus, less of a regular occurrence.

Some might argue then that this makes the shows that much more memorable and special. I would say that makes them more precious, but nothing will take away the experience I had when I saw Discount five times in the span of about four months in 2000. I will never forget how special it was when I saw Ghost Mice and Heathers five times in four days in 2009. Or how honored I was to be a part of a Turboslut mini tour in 2008 where they played Philly, Richmond and

DC to intimate, enthusiastic crowds. Who can take that away from me? No one. I love the bands I love, the way Dead Heads follow The Dead or grown women trample each other for a chance to see Neil Diamond. This music is important to me and to others. It may not be as pretty or trippy as other, more commercially viable or well marketed bands are, but it's the soundtrack to my life and it's important that the live shows be a part of that.



Pygmy Lush still operates under the self-made, self-perpetuated model of how to be a band. It's not as easy as it used to be. Albuquerque was not too kind financially to this touring circus, though the little scratch they made between Tulsa and Phoenix was probably better than an off night, maybe. It was a ten-hour drive after all. A meal and some sleep might have been better. But at least one person in this town was very grateful that they unloaded the trailer, set up their gear, drank some beers and played some songs, old and new for the drinking age kids and bar patrons of Duke City. The pay off came in that there were no rules. They could have played till last call, and they went damn close with a thirty minute extended jam version of "It's a Good Day To Hide". I know it was thirty minutes because I sent a text to my friend Nolan at 12:36 AM that it was the last song and then again when it was 12:55 AM that they were still playing. I had to go to the bathroom after that and they were still playing after I got done and walked from the back of the bar to where they were playing. That's some epic kind of shit that you're just not going to see at a Kid Rock concert.



PART TWO

- *An unidentified person snuck into the graveyard and chiseled an inscription. The epitaph read only one word... 'Pals'.*

From the movie, *Young Guns*.

I woke up early the next day and by 10:30 had picked up Nolan and set off for Phoenix. Phoenix is 465 miles if you take I-40 west to Flagstaff and then head south on I-17. It doesn't seem that long if you forget that there is a time change at the border of New Mexico and Arizona, so you know, don't keep that in mind next time you want to go to the city where they filmed "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure". It's also really awesome to bring along a new friend who you can share all your stories with on the way back home because you decide to leave right after Pygmy Lush plays and partake in that hell ride over again. But we'll get to that in a minute.

The desert is beautiful and it's also deserted. Driving through these states down here in the southwest is not at all like driving up and down I-95. First of all, I have never driven more than five hours to see a band play, ever. Not that I wouldn't have, but like I said, in my hey days I could see a band four times and never have to drive more than two and half hours from my bed.

That usually meant driving home after the show was not a problem. But between Albuquerque and Phoenix are the following towns that I can attest to: Gallup, Grants and Flagstaff. The rest is reservation land and towns that look like they have long ago lost their last residents. If you miss that Denny's or the gas station on Navajo land, you're fucked. And I'm not going to lie to you now, I was terrified of getting stuck out there. My car is old, not broken down, but it's definitely at that point in its life where weird, unexpected things can happen, especially when you're traveling at 75 miles an hour on the highway.

We can conclude then, that I have truly lost my mind while staying in the desert city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, being unemployed and having way too much free time on my hands. But this is the litmus of value in life. We can ascribe a monetary figure to this trip if that would make you feel better. But since I am not in the business of considering my readers feelings, I'm not going to do that. Because as I believe I said at the top of the hour here, "Money is bullshit" and I am frankly not interested in cost anymore. I worked in banking and finance for ten years. I've had enough conversations about that world of fiction for one lifetime. The proverbial payoff of being in the presence of the music made by the above described musicians was enough.



If the Albuquerque show was a small gift, the Phoenix show was a gigantic present. The hours in the car did fly by, for me at least, in anticipation of this. I was, to be honest, let down by the previous night. Not because the bands weren't amazing, they surely were, but the anticipation of that evening loomed over my existence for weeks prior. The anxiety of the evening drove me damn near insane and the familiar experience in an unfamiliar setting made it surreal. It was almost like it didn't happen, like I dreamt it up in the insomniac hours of my life. This may have been why my resolve to drive an inordinate amount of hours and miles was so strong. No sane person makes this decision. No person with pressing matters in their lives does this kind of thing. I let the laundry pile up, the dishes needed to be put away, I should probably try to find a job before the unemployment runs out. I have things I should, in a right mind, be doing. Even now, as I type this, the so-called "real world" nags at me. But I forgot all that as we hit the road that morning.

Phoenix is a weird city. In fact, and to the kids from this town, don't take this personally, because you were AWESOME with a capital AWESOME, I hate Phoenix more than anywhere I have ever been. This includes New York City, Los Angeles and Redskins Stadium in Megachurh Parking Lot, Maryland. Sound Kontrol, where the show was hosted was awesome. It was a small warehouse space in the most fucked up neighborhood I have ever been in. We drove down a road that on one side was filled with boarded up projects, decaying houses, thrashed cars and some people who clearly looked like they had a hard life. On

the other side of the street, as if this was all perfectly normal, were McMansions the size of my fucking apartment building. The yards were pristine, filled with palm trees and lush shrubbery. It was surreal. Never mind the drive in from the moment we hit the city limits was filled with strip mall after strip mall in an expansive suburban sprawl that has swallowed Scottsdale, Glendale and Tempe in a sea of massive suburban hell much like my former stomping grounds of Northern Virginia. It strengthened my resolve that Albuquerque is the perfect place for me right now. Even if there is no meaningful work for money I can do here.

About an hour or so after Nolan and I arrived, worn and skeptical and horrified, Pygmy Lush and Des Ark pulled up, the soundtrack from *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* blasting from their van's stereo. Somehow, somewhere between their two shows, they decided to stop off at a roadside merchant and purchase cowboy hats, ponchos and bajos. Noah emerged with a trucker hat accentuated by a carnation and Hunter S. Thompson sunglasses. The life of a band on tour is one of peculiarity, clearly. They acted like this wardrobe was perfectly natural, unloading once again and set up to play.

The ferocity of a full band Des Ark show is enough to make you want to quit music sometimes. Aimée Argote approaches the guitar and song writing like no one else. I don't know how much of this is conscious and learned and how much is just instinct. I can't believe it is all of one or the other because it is just too good to be either one alone. All I know is that I am perplexed and in awe of how original a musician she is. Never mind all the other gooepy, emotional bullshit. I mean, that is all-powerful, but when you strip it all down to technique, you still get something that no one else on this planet is doing. It's as equally perplexing that Noah Howard can keep up with that. The music is genderless, not surprisingly really, combining a car accident of the masculine and feminine properties that music has. If you have no idea what I am talking about find Chad Clark of The Beauty Pill and beg him to explain it because he is much more capable of articulating these ideas than I ever will be. I failed at being a music journalist, get the fuck over it.

Des Ark put it all out there, playing all new songs from the new album with a pride and joy that is unheralded by any band I have ever seen in my entire life. And I've seen some great ones in my lifetime too. "Ashley's Song" is an unhinged rage about rape that haunts and scars and kills your insides. It's difficult enough to stomach on the album, but it explodes instantly live, Aimée and Noah playing a type of musical tag while Johnny Ward beats the living hell out of the drums. "FTW y'all" is one of my favorites on the album and has thus become one of the songs I hope to hear the most when THE ARK rolls into town. Luckily I got to hear it twice and watch this epic story of lovers and friendship

unfold in a happy kind of nervous excitement. Shit gets heavy when Chris Taylor adds vocals to a new, amazing song that probably won't come out for years and that pisses me off because I am selfish. Things get goose bumpy as Aimée and Johnny step away from the loud and get into the middle of the crowd for some honest, uncomfortable sad acoustic jams. They unleashed some more new ones, Johnny Ward playing Violin and thus again giving the unexpected. Things get crazy with "Two Hearts are Better than One" a love song to a friend and go all out for the throat on the charged "It's Only a Bargain If You Want It" which makes me sad and want to cry. This, alone was worth the drive to Phoenix. I was greedy and I got all I could have hoped for.



Aimée gives and gives and gives more than any other artist I have come across in my lifetime and still I can't get enough. I've stolen enough of her face with that goddamn camera and yet I can't seem to sit still with it all. All I want for my thievery is that maybe, somehow in the story of Des Ark, these images of this powerful, beautiful, amazing woman with a guitar in her hand, hell in her stomach and fury in her voice inspires one or thousands of other women to take the plunge, find the courage or just tell the patriarch to go fuck itself and pick up that instrument they always wanted to and howl against all the shit. Maybe then, at the end of this life Aimée will forgive me for all I've taken. Because of all of this, I do not envy Pygmy Lush over the six weeks that they (possibly foolishly) take the stage after Des Ark. But if anyone could match that power and beauty it is five life long friends from Sterling, VA. They scraped at

the walls, dug up the soil, suffered in the sun, walked dark and lonely streets at night, loved, laughed, lost and went mad with friends still here and in the absence of those lost to the world. If *Mount Hope* was a testament to growing up the right way, *Old Friends* is the embodiment of getting older and trying to hold on as the world continues to pick at you, take from you and never let go of you with its choking embrace.



If talking about music is hard enough, it's impossible to talk about what it is that Pygmy Lush actually does. See, what needs to be explicitly clear is that these are five friends, from a suburb in Virginia that went from being pretty poor to pretty rich to pretty fucked up since they've lived there over the last thirty years or so. I know, because I lived in the town right next door in one of the richest counties in the country. Sterling was where the poor people lived according to the elite, working class government shit heads that made my idealized suburban town of Herndon a living hell. We were all suppose to look down on people from Sterling, a struggling suburb of Washington DC that seemed just out of reach, though that was more psychological than physical really. And yet this is where Pygmy Lush came from, eventually being pushed out of their suburban homes and into the retreat of the surrounding farm land. All five of them, friends since childhood, constantly playing music with each other, sharing deep experiences of first loves, last kisses, drunken nights, drugs, death and hiding under the covers. This is an epic story, one I've seen through a looking-glass at times, that can't clearly be captured in the words on a screen. I

want so badly to convey this understanding, but I can neither truly understand it, nor with any authority talk about others lives that I only know, mostly, through songs.

And I guess that's the point, is that so much of this comes through the music that to try to subtract any of this from the songs is nearly impossible for me to do. Chris Taylor is a poet of unending observation. It's personal and yet universal, the way any great lyricist is. Reading the lyrics to the new album, I find a man whose thoughts come in broken syllables as he tries to express gratitude to kinship through a hazy, weary head. The sentences stop short, contemplated upon but sometimes the full thought isn't spoken and in the absence the power is revealed. All the instruments feel subtle and almost subdued. It's meditative really, washed and wet and running live a river. I'm trying, with vigor an intensity to take it all in and yet there are so many layers to it all it will be months before any of this makes sense.



For me, I put the lens to their faces in an effort not to be included, but to remind myself and others of what it means to have friends. This world, we can only hope for the comfort and understanding of these strange people that surround us. For the five guys in Pygmy Lush, I just want to give a documentation of these times, so when their bones and muscles start to fail them and life on the road is no longer possible and time has put them on opposite ends of the earth and in the life spectrum, they can look back and smile. It's not a job I take lightly, but

it's hardly for any personal gain, other than the satisfaction of seeing the story captured, believing it was real.

Together, Des Ark and Pygmy Lush have simultaneously released two of the most powerful records that have ever been recorded. They share so much in common and yet they are such completely different albums. If they are to be relegated to the punk rock ghetto, then they will be well received and loved with a ferocity and desire that will create even more unreal expectations on these people. But this should not happen. It's not about how they've paid their dues, that's clear by anyone's standards. It's not about artistic integrity, for there are few artists who have the same integrity as these folks. It isn't even about talent and the ability to create something accessible and palatable for consumption, because this isn't easy music but it is vital and essential art that is being made. While the sounds and stories are timeless, and I will stand by that statement if pressed in the future, the music is the music of the world right now. It is stories we all know are there, on that side of the street where plywood covers up the windows, but we want to turn away from.

It's all the insanity and misery we get while in between finding those lovers and friends that help us get by and survive. There is a lonely collection of voices here, that I will attest and sometimes unhealthily attach to. But there is empowerment in the self redemption. And the bottom line, the music is fucking great. Sounds so inventive, new and fresh have not been made before and have not been heard before. You can get all your Radiohead bullshit with their blip/bleep toys or your PJ Harvey experimenting in the sounds of native people who are not hers and you can shove that shit up your ass if you think it changes anything. It's all just entertainment out there, whatever you're being sold by whom ever is hocking you the goods. And even though I've shaken hands, offered up hugs, bought beers and sat and talked to all the people aforementioned in this tyrannical rant, none of that changes my opinion, my steadfast argument, about how important these albums are. For me, yes, having a slightly more personal relationship enhances the experience and that's not something I take for granted. But even if I was living under a rock in south Florida, this would still be the music I'd want most in my life.

Nolan and I made the unwise, rash, stupid decision to drive back to Albuquerque from Phoenix right after Pygmy Lush played. I looked into the eyes of Aimée Argote and Mike Taylor and tried in desperate vain to communicate how happy I was to see them, how happy their music once again made me, how inspired and powerful the last two nights of my life were. They both have these types of eyes that are rich and deep and thoughtful. They are clearly more aware than I am, mine excited and dancing and unable to sit still.

Our individual self-awareness is radically different from each other, but damn it, I love those people.

There was a last hug from Noah, gentle, thrilled Noah whom if time and distance was less cruel and separating I would love to get to know more. He thanked me for my enthusiasm and I felt kind of stupid, but that's exactly what this is about, fulfilling the id, succumbing to impulse, throwing caution and careful and security to the wind and driving lonely miles and spending important money on shit that no one else understands but you. We broke free, Nolan and I and headed out of Phoenix for an awesome endurance ride. Plunged for hours in the darkness, Nolan and I talked (mostly me) high on music and caffeine, sharing stories, hopes, dreams, ideas and angers and fears. It was the kind of trip you take with friends, you don't know what will happen and expectations are high and in the end, it's a lot of fun and worth being sleep deprived.

I watched the sun rise of Albuquerque, the Sandia Mountains massive and crushing as always, the city revealing itself as I took the crest of a hill. Lights from casino's danced on all sides of the roads ever fifty miles or so. I don't know. I can't talk about time or distance or anything else. Not after this trip, not after those songs, those sounds. Not after this awesome adventure.



Gone To Croatoan – Albuquerque, NM



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